

Ignorance

English: Ignorance

Tibetan: མ་རིག་པ། *Ma-rig-pa* (*Ma* = not, *Rig-pa* = knower/to know/cognition/to cognize)

Ignorance is a mental factor and a mental consciousness. In general, it can be defined on many levels and thus there are various types of ignorance. One type of ignorance is the mental factor that is a mere *not-knowing*, a lack of understanding. An example of this is the ignorance that does not understand how the engine of a car works or the ignorance that does not know the alphabet. However, this type of ignorance is one of the most superficial or coarsest.

Another type of ignorance is the mental factor that is not merely confused about reality but actively misapprehends it. It is a distorted perception of its object. In fact, it is a misconception that is diametrically opposed to what actually exists.

There are also various types of this kind of ignorance. In the Sutras nineteen different types of ignorance are described which are various kinds of wrong perception related to extreme positions.

Furthermore, there are numerous layers of that ignorance in terms of coarseness and subtlety. Some of the subtlest types of ignorance are so subtle that we may not even be aware of them.

However, in general, ignorance that is a misperception or misconception is said to be of two types:

1. Deprecating misconception
2. Superimposing misconception

1. Deprecating misconception

English: deprecating misconception

Tibetan: ཀུར་དེ་བས་ཀྱི་ལོག་ཏོག་ *Kur-deb kyi Log-Tog* (*Kur-deb* = deprecate/deny/understate/belittle,

kyi = genitive, *Log[pa]* = wrong/reverse/opposite, *Tog[pa]* = conceptual consciousness)

An example of a deprecating misconception is the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of karma, or the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of past and future lives.

They are *deprecating* misconceptions because they perceive the *non-existence* of something that actually exists.

2. Superimposing misconception

English: superimposing misconception

Tibetan: ལྷོ་དོག་པས་ཀྱི་ལོག་ཏོག་ *Dro-dog kyi log tog* (*Dro-dog* = superimpose/exaggerate/reify/postulate,

Dro = feather, *Dog[pa]* = fasten/tie/designate/impute)

An example of a superimposing misconception is the ignorance that apprehends the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self, the ignorance that apprehends the existence of a self-sufficient substantially existent self, or the ignorance that apprehends the existence of an inherently existent self. They are *superimposing* misconceptions because they apprehend the *existence* of something that does not exist.

Another way to categorize ignorance is to categorize it into:

1. Innate or instinctive ignorance
2. Intellectually or ideologically acquired ignorance

1. Innate ignorance

English: Innate or instinctive ignorance

Tibetan: མ་རིག་པ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་། *Ma-Rig-pa Lhaen-kye* (*Lhaen-kye* = innate/instinctive/inborn/spontaneous)

Innate ignorance is a misperception that arises naturally for all sentient beings. It is inborn and not conditioned by the culture and environment we live in. Regarding, for instance, the innate ignorance apprehending the non-existence of the law of karma, we may have developed firm conviction in the working of karma and live in a community that holds that same conviction. However, when we encounter problems and difficulties we instinctively blame other people or the environment for our problems; we spontaneously ascribe to them the main responsibility for all our trouble.

Similarly, even though we know rationally that our mind and body change moment by moment, we often have the sense that we ourselves and others do not change and always remain the same. Also, though we understand that one day we are going to die, we plan and live our lives as if we were immortal.

Furthermore, even if we have realized the lack of an inherently existent "I" and "mine", until we overcome the seeds of the *innate* ignorance apprehending inherent existence, there will be the spontaneous and instinctive sense of an inherently existent self etc., which in turn will induce attachment, aversion, and other delusions.

2. Intellectually acquired ignorance

English: Intellectually or ideologically acquired ignorance

Tibetan: མ་རིག་པ་ཀུན་བརྟགས། *Ma-Rig-pa Kuen-dag* (*Kuen-dag* = acquired/constructed/imputed/artificial)

Intellectually or ideologically acquired ignorance, though rooted in innate ignorance, is a misperception that is not innate but comes about due to the influence of philosophical, religious, scientific, or cultural views and beliefs.

For example, at the time of the Buddha there were a number of philosophical systems that postulated a *permanent, partless, independent self*. Likewise, many religions accept the existence of a soul, a permanent entity that exists independent of mind and body. And then we have the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's descriptions of the ego and the super-ego as well as cultural ideas that encourage us "to be someone in the world", "to be true to ourselves", and to "find ourselves". All these are the results of the intellectually acquired view of a solid and unique self.

Another intellectually acquired view is the acquired ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of past and future lives. This misconception comes about due to the current widely accepted scientific view that our mind is merely the product of chemical reactions within our brain and body which ceases to exist at the time of death when those chemical reactions come to an end.

Religious beliefs in an omnipotent creator God, for example, arise from an acquired ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of karma.

Ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence

English: Ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence

Tibetan: འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བར་གྱུར་པའི་མ་རིག་པ། *Khor-wai Tsa-war gyur pai Ma-rig-pa*

(*Khor-wa* = cyclic existence/ samsara, *Tsa-wa* = root/primary/fundamental, *gyur-pa* = to be)

Ignorance that is the root of all other delusions and thus the root of cyclic existence is the ignorance that apprehends inherent existence. Ignorance that apprehends inherent existence is the root of all other delusions because it induces all the other delusions; it induces the other types of ignorance (such as the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of cause and effect, the ignorance that apprehends the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self, etc.) as well as anger, attachment, arrogance, jealousy, and so forth.

This root ignorance is also of two types:

1. Ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of the **"I" and "mine"**
2. Ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of **phenomena** (phenomena other than "I" and "mine")

Since both types of ignorance apprehend inherent existence, they are both the root of cyclic existence.